Mask and Domino

David L. Proudfit

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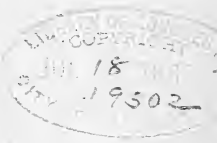
MASK AND DOMINO

BY

DAVID L. PROUDFIT.



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TO MY THREE BOYS.

I AM indebted to the *Century Magazine* for permission to reprint such of the following poems as were originally published in that magazine. The character sketches in the latter part of the volume first appeared in the *New York Daily Graphic*, in its early days, over the pen name of Peleg Arkwright, an awkward and unsuggestive pseudonym which I did not originate myself, and of which I was always heartily ashamed.

THE AUTHOR.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE.
The Willis	7
At Odds with Life	9
A Brilliant	15
Ere Summer Pass Away	18
Reunion	19
Yval and the Queen	23
A Dream	26
Bismillah	28
In the Academy of Design	30
The Palmer	33
In the Confessional	37
Felis	39
Tatting	41
Veronica	43
A Romance of the Jerseys	46
Mask and Domino	52
Decoration Day	56
The Indicator	59
A Kiss	62
Portrait or Spectre	65
Reason and Faith	68

PAGE.

Love's World 71
Apotheosis 74
An Antient Legend 77
Cousin Floy 83
Frost Pictures 86
Prehistoric Smith 89
Pro and Con 92
Life and Character 93
I Want 96
Coasting 98
Tableaux 100
The Unattainable 103
Silver-Gloss and Tangle-Foot 105
A Catastrophe 110
Down the Switchback 112

METROPOLITAN CHARACTER SKETCHES IN VERSE.

The Bartender's Story 117
The Old Fireman's Story 122
Daddy Flick's Spree 128
Poor Little Joe 134
Under a Canvas Sky 138
Father John 144
Love in Oyster Bay 148
Warden Keep a Place for Me 151

THE WILLIS.

THE Willis are out to-night,
In the ghostly pale moonlight,
With robes and faces white.

Swiftly they circle round,
And make not any sound,
Nor footprint on the ground.

The forest is asleep;
All things that fly or creep
A death-like silence keep.

A fear is over all;
From spectral trees and tall
The gathering night-dews fall.

Moveless are leaf and limb,
While through the forest dim
Slow glides a figure slim.

A figure slim and fair,
With loosened, streaming hair,
Watching the Willis there!

"These are the ghosts," she said,
"Of hapless ones unwed,
Who loved and now are dead."

Her hair was drenched with dew;
The moonlight shimmered through
And showed its raven hue.

"Each one of these," she cried,
"Or ever she was a bride,
For love's sake sinned and died."

"I come," she said, "I too;
Ye are by one too few,"
And joined the phantom crew.

Swiftly they circled round,
Nor was there any sound,
Nor footprint on the ground.

AT ODDS WITH LIFE.

'TIS a toilsome path to climb,
But all climbing is sublime
(If you think so). One flight more,
Yonder is the studio door.
Artists' eyries should be high,
Don't you think so? Near the sky;
Up above the small affairs
Of our lower life of cares;
Up, far up, in regions where
Stars and comets float in air;
In an atmosphere that brings
Glimpses of unusual things
Unto those who dare to soar
To the shifting, changeful shore
Of strange fancies, fair and far.
Tired, Elsie? Here we are.

No one here. Sit down, my dear.
Rest a moment. It is clear
He will soon return. You see?

Palette, brushes, carelessly
Flung about in artist fashion.
Ah, these men of fire and passion
Love disorder, and it seems
To befit a man of dreams.
Let me whisper something, dear;
I've a fancy—though I fear
'T is irreverent indeed—
That our average artists need
Something more of that fine fire
Which ethereal dreams inspire,
To redeem them from the trace
Of an easy common-place.

This the merit of our friend:
He begins where others end.
With all their fidelity,
Color, form, and harmony,
He has something better worth;
Something of a nobler birth,
Born of earthquakes, lightnings, storms.
He has friends in fairy forms,
Such as throng the midnight hours,
Play with meteoric showers,
Ride auroras through the sky,
Mount the crescent moon on high,
Then go fishing down the night
After stars of faded light;
Familiar, he, of elf and gnome;

All fantastic shapes that roam
Sceptred, winged, a glorious band,
Through the mystery-haunted land—
Wondrous land of fire-fly gleams—
Seen of poets in their dreams.

But the dreamers, men who see
Shadowy forms of mystery
In the earth and sea and sky;
Men whose wingéd fancies fly
To the uttermost, remote
Realms where shapes ethereal float;
Men whose fine sense subtly hears
Music from the distant spheres,—
Often miss their heritage
In this heartless, hurrying age,
Though, too late, their fame may be
Handed to posterity.
For they seem at odds with life,
Armored feebly for its strife.
And our friend, whose picture there
Shadows forth such white despair,
Hath his trials, I surmise;
For, within his hungry eyes,
When I saw him last, I read
Something curious, vague and dread.
Then I said that I would buy
This Prometheus, and his eye
Lit up strangely, with a fire

Born of some extreme desire.
Think you famine's spector stood
With him in his solitude?

Had we sooner come, indeed,
It perhaps had served his need.
But you like it? Then to-day
There shall be no more delay.
See what vigor, grandeur, gloom;
What an atmosphere of doom!
What a hopeless, vast despair,
In that figure lying there
Chained with iron links and rods!
Awful eyes, that judge the gods!
Face of agony untold,
Yet contemptuous, scornful, bold!
Bare, cold rocks, uplifted high
To a lowering, thunderous sky;
And a sea in league with fate,
Making all things desolate!
Yes, with somber feeling tainted,
But a picture grandly painted.
Such a canvas lifts the soul
Out of Habit's dull control,
Plumes Imagination's wing,
And crowns the artist like a king.

What a strange collection here!
Curious, is it not, my dear?

Rubbish, some good folk would say,
In their lofty, stupid way,
Lacking insight. Who can tell
What suggestions herein dwell?
See this travesty in wood
Of a human attitude;
There a figure stuffed with hair,
Semblance of a lady fair;
Bits of armor, china, lace,
Plaster hands, a foot, a face,
A sword, a Malay creese, a knife
Fit to take a pirate's life;
Gobelin tapestry, faded, rare,
Screening in yon alcove there
Such a dismal effigy
Hanging from a beam. You see?

Well, my gentleman is late.
Elsie, since we still must wait,
What thing better can I do
Than to make love, sweet, to you?
Nay, no prudery, my dear!
What vague presence do you fear!
Rosy lips, one little kiss!—
Elsie, darling, what is this?
Trembling, and your face is white!
What has frozen you with fright?
Tell me, precious! Speak to me!
Do you dread yon effigy?

No, no, no, my sweet, 't is naught!
'T is not living, as you thought!
See, 't is nothing you should fear!
It is—— horror! What is here?
Come away! come! come! 't is true,
This is not a place for you!

A BRILLIANT.

IN fiery bowels of the earth
Fierce flames were privy to its birth.

Then for a thousand ages dark
Was hid its fine, celestial spark

Beneath a million tons of rock
Piled on it by an earthquake's shock;

Until a desperate, ruffian band
Of grimy miners, knife in hand,

Fought for the twinkling, star-like stone.
The winner, going forth alone

To taste the sweets of fortune fair,
Was robbed and perished in despair.

Then to a sallow, eastern king
Was brought the scintillating thing.

And wars ensued, for kings were then
Of passions like to common men,

And each would have the marvellous gem
For flashing of his diadem.

It tossed on battle storms until,
Its wayward destiny to fulfil,

A god's adornment it became,
Whose glory was his eye of flame.

The god was tumbled from his throne,
And then it graced a maiden's zone.

And then 'twas lost. The maiden fair—
But that is neither here nor there.

Another thousand years it lay
Hid from the inferior light of day,

Until, at sacking of a town,
A soldier grim of no renown

Found it, and sold it for a song.
And so its history sped along.

Through crimes of love and death it came,
With mysteries in its heart of flame.

A BRILLIANT.

Thou Queen of Dreams, I give to thee
This dazzling Stone of Destiny.

But ask not by what devious way
It cometh to thy hand to-day.

It hath been cousin to a crime
Through every darkening age of time.

Ask not too much, but calmly wear
Its splendor in thy shining hair.

A very star befitting seems
Thy twilight beauty, Queen of Dreams.

ERE SUMMER PASS AWAY.

O LOVE, dear love, the summer sun is shining,
And life is beautiful with tint and tune;
And all things rare and sweet, enwrapt, entwining,
Lie dreaming in the murmurous air of June;
Then love me, love, ere summer pass away,
And dark and cold shall dawn a loveless day.

O love, dear love, come nearer still and nearer,
For youth and hope to-day go hand-in-hand;
The air is softer and the sky is clearer
For all the low words whispered through the land;
Then love me, love, ere all this pass away,
And wintry winds bemoan a loveless day.

O love, dear love, for joy of thy caresses,
For all the love-light in thy lustrous eyes,
For all the perfume of thy silken tresses,
A soft enchantment on the fair world lies;
Then love me, love, lest all should pass away,
And death draw near upon a loveless day.

REUNION.

IT is twenty years, my comrades, twenty solid years to date,
Since we were stripling captains, dapper youngsters slim and straight;
And now in portly manhood, wise and serious, we are met,
To gossip of the stirring times of sword and bayonet.

Our portly manhood, as above, our silvered heads and all,
May be respected, more or less, by circles large or small;
But, my comrades, all the honors of our civil walks and ways
Seem but empty to the glory of the old, heroic days.

Yet the martial pomp and grandeur, failing somehow to connect,
Were not always clearly present at the time, I recollect.

There were dusty, weary marches, not romantic in the least,
More especially if rations chanced to fail for man or beast.

There were times when human nature had to murmur just a bit;
There were seasons of bad language, yes, the truth I must admit;
There were bivouacs in the rain or snow, black darkness overhead,
The sodden ground beneath us, with a fence-rail for a bed.

But what appetites for lobscouse, and what dinners large and free,
Supplemented by a canteen full of "Commissary B";
With the haughty Sothron's hoe-cake, and the colored aunty's pie,
And a streamlet for a finger-bowl, if one meandered by.

Do you remember, comrades, how we fought and overcame
Those guerilla ducks and turkeys, war-like pigs and other game?
And those savage rebel chickens, who would die but never yield,
Whom we faced with deathless valor on so many a Southern field?

REUNION.

Though we murmured, though our language was at times
a trifle queer,
Though we had but little reverence even for a brigadier,
Though we grumbled at the Government with almost
every breath,
Yet we faced the gray battalions, all undaunted, to the
death.

We fought them and we killed them, and they killed
us in return;
But we never thought to hate them, and we never cared
to learn.
We met them on the picket lines, with flags of truce
between:
They were "Johnnies," we were "Yanks," and better
friends were never seen.

What anomalies and contrasts! I recall a day in June,
When the world was warm with summer, and the birds
were all in tune;
Peace and beauty all about us, death and danger just
ahead,
On our faces careless courage, in our hearts a somber
dread.

Then the skirmish line went forward, and the only sounds
we heard
Were the hum of droning insects and the carol of a
bird;

Till, far off, a flash of fire, and a little cloud went by,
Like an angel's mantle floating down from out an azure sky.

Then a shell went screaming o'er us, and the air at once was rife
With a million whispering hornets, swiftly searching for a life;
And the birds and insects fled away before the "rebel yell,"
The thunder of the battle, and the furious flames of hell.

Other memories come thronging. When our shoulder-straps were new
We were nearly all the world, but now, alas, we are so few:
Then we marched with ringing footsteps, looking gayly to the fore;
Now with wistful, dreamy glances, we look back to days of yore.

If the spirits of the dead revisit earth for weal or woe,
We might fancy they would join us, those dear friends of long ago.
Hush, who knows what ghostly comrades may have come with noiseless feet,
In the old familiar friendliness, to make our band complete?

YVAL AND THE QUEEN.

YOUNG lord Yval to his comrades pledged the queen
with kindling eye;
"She is matchless, radiant, glorious! queen by right of
virtues high!
For one kiss of her sweet lips I would be well content
to die!"

Cruel, crafty, bold and sudden was the temper of the
king;
Wearied, sated of his pleasures, gnawed his nails in
listening;
With a bitter malice smiling at the strangeness of the
thing.

"Ho, my guards, arrest yon stripling! something may
be learned from this;
Haply values must be changing; 'twill be something new
I wis
If this sorry merchant barter life for one unfruitful kiss."

On the morrow, purple vestured, sat the king and queen
in state,
While before the throne the people, cowed and tyrant-
ridden, wait,
Till, to serve the king's good pleasure, young Yval should
meet his fate.

He, the clear-eyed, stood there fearless; radiant mid the
general gloom;
Flushed, as though the gods had granted some long-
prayed-for, splendid doom;
Proud, as though triumphal arches spanned the gateway
to the tomb.

Close beside, a swarthy slave with naked arm and naked
blade,
Stood to give the stroke of fate unto the stripling, un-
dismayed;
While the brooding, dark-browed monarch still the bitter
word delayed.

But the queen!—ah, who shall tell what thought within
her bosom lay?
For no sign she made, but sat there, mutely gazing far
away,
With her marvellous face outshining all the wealth of
her array.

Spake the king: "My lords, a riddle! What the value of a kiss?
This presumptuous youth believeth that a life fair payment is."
Then he laughed. "My queen, what say you? Doth such trading seem amiss?"

Loud he laughed. "And you, my lords? Still dumb? Ye all have doubts I see.
Choose, then, fool, an' if thou wilt thou shalt have life and liberty."
Yval answered not in words but at the queen looked pleadingly.

Oh, the queen! Her eyes shone strangely. Down she stepped with regal grace;
And a mournful, tender passion, swift and strong, lit up her face;
And she kissed him, kiss for kiss, and death was naught for that embrace!

Then forth stepped a mighty warrior, drew an arrow to its head:
"She is ours, and no two men can kiss the queen and live," he said,
Twanged the bow-string, hissed the arrow, and the tyrant king fell dead.

A DREAM.

"One spake, but I knew not the voice nor whence it came."

WHAT heights are mine thou shalt not know,
What dark abysses yawn below;
Nor empty words like heaven and hell,
Shall to thy senses dull and slow
A meaning tell.

Thou thinkest of a mountain's crest,
Upreared upon the world's broad breast,
As of a height that shall endure;
To thee, yon star in splendor drest,
Is fixed and sure.

Long since I quenched its flaming light;
Yet it shall shine in radiance bright,
Or e'er its phantom disappears,
(So far it lies in depths of night)
A thousand years.

A DREAM.

Poor fluttering soul! thy pinions play
Upon the obvious verge of day,
    Inquiring of eternal things;
One unexpected, casual ray,
    Would scorch thy wings.

Thou soarest upward, thinking, sooth,
To grasp immeasurable truth;
    To-morrow thou art bent and worn;
Spaces and ages in their youth
    Laugh thee to scorn.

Content thyself within thy place;
Thy world for thee hath ample space;
    Do well therein nor look afar;
One simple deed of kindly grace
    Outshines a star.

BISMILLAH.

FORTH from his tent the patriarch Abraham stept,
And lengthening shadows slowly past him crept.

For many days he scarce had broke his fast,
Lest some poor wanderer should come at last,

And, scanty comfort finding, go his way,
In doubt of God's grea mercy day by day.

But deep contentment in his calm eyes shone
When he beheld, afar, a pilgrim lone,

Fare slowly toward him from the flaming west,
With weary steps betokening need of rest.

When that he came anear, straightway was seen
An aged man of grave and reverend mien.

"Guest of mine eyes, here let thy footsteps halt,"
The patriarch said, "and share my bread and salt."

Then calling to his kinsfolk, soon the board
Was laden richly with the patriarch's hoard.

And when around the fair repast they drew,
"Bismillah!" said they all with reverence due;

Save only he for whom the feast was spread:
He bowed him gravely, but no word he said.

Then Abraham thus: "O guest, is it not meet
To utter God's great name ere thou dost eat?"

The pilgrim answered, courteous but calm,
"Good friend, of those who worship fire I am."

Then Abraham rose, his brow with anger bent,
And drove the aged Gheber from his tent.

That instant, swifter than a flashing sword,
Appeared and spake an angel of the Lord.

In shining splendor wrapt, the bright one said:
"An hundred years upon this aged head

God's mercy hath been lavished from on high,
In life and sun and rain. Dost thou deny

What God withholds not from the meanest clod?"
The patriarch bowed in meekness. Great is God.

IN THE ACADEMY OF DESIGN.

I SAW her in the corridor,
  Her form was beauty's own;
She tripped up lightly from the door,
And stood, a splendid dream, before
  A portraiture by Stone.

She looked around with tranquil air;
  A muff before her stood;
He seemed, beside her beauty rare,
A study for a *genre* there,
  By Thomas W. Wood.

She seemed to care for him no whit,
  As at her face he peered;
No doubt she only thought him fit
For application of the wit
  Of dear, facetious Beard.

He matched so ill her grace divine,
I wished he might be shot
By one of those extremely fine
And stately soldiers, the design
Of Mr. Julian Scott.

Her hair was auburn; fold on fold
It fell in wavy flow;
And as its glory downward rolled,
It shone with shining gleams of gold,
Like sunset by Gignoux.

Her lissome grace you could perceive,
For all her rich array;
I'm sure she rivaled Powers' Eve,
And was as sweet as Genevieve
By Henry Peters Gray.

But, oh, the splendor of her eyes!
Deep as the deepest sea,
As radiant as the stars that rise,
As fathomless as summer skies
By Jervis M'Entee!

She shone the brightest jewel there,
Among those gems of art;
With manners gay and debonair,
More brightly, softly, sweetly fair
Than autumn scene by Hart.

Methinks upon that lily hand
A ring I fain would fix;
With her before the altar stand,
And hear, with joy, the accents bland
Of Dr. Morgan Dix.

THE PALMER.

A HOLY man returned from Palestine?
Now let the castle gates be opened wide!
In God's name bid him enter; food and wine
Set forth, that so to him this even-tide
May joyous be. Mayhap it chances so
That he somewhat of our dear liege may know.

God grant he may have tidings! Hither now
He comes; worn, weary, bent and slow;
A monkish cowl doth overhang his brow;
They seat him at the board; he bends him low
In prayerful wise; I cannot stay apart—
I must speak with him straight. Peace, throbbing heart!

Thy blessing, father!—Nay, but sit and eat.
A cup of water? Sure thy vows must be
Austere indeed, forbidding wine and meat
On weary journeys. Prithee now to me
Unfold if aught thou knowest of my lord,
Who went to Paynim lands with his good sword.

Thou sayest well; he was the stateliest knight
That ever marched to those far-distant shores.
God wot, I know that on the breast of fight
Ever in front his crested helmet towers!
The prince he was of princeliest Christian men,
What must he be to dark-browed Saracen?

I mind me, Palmer, how my bosom swelled
When first I saw him couch his pennoned lance;
In merry joust his valiant right arm quelled
The best and bravest of the knights of France;
And when victorious in the gallant fray,
He crowned me Queen of Beauty on that day.

And when he brought me hither as his bride,
And through these gates we entered hand in hand,
No queen was ever flushed with more of pride,
No dame so happy was in all the land;
And when he armed him for the holy war,
God speed I gave him, though my heart was sore.

Alas the day! My memory lingers yet
Upon the scene of parting that befell;
He stooped him, while his prancing steed did fret,
To kiss the little child he loved so well;
Then sternly rode he forth, my kingly one,
And all his armor glistened in the sun.

Come hither, Hubert! This the comely boy
  I held in arms the while he rode apace.
My Hubert! Thou art still my only joy!
  See, doth he not reveal his knightly race?
Will not my lord, when he doth come again,
Rejoice to see his boy approved of men?

Thou tremblest with fatigue, good Palmer; yet,
  Before thou goest to thy rest, I pray,
Tell me but this: My noble spouse hath met
  With naught of ill, so far—so far away?
What sayest thou, dreadful monk, beneath thy cowl?
Perdition seize thee for thy tidings foul!

Return no more again to France and me?
  At hands of swarthy Paynim hosts he bled?
His fallen, lifeless body thou didst see?
  Jesu have mercy! Dead! My lord is dead!
Thou liest, monk! Ah, pardon! See, I kneel;
My heart is breaking, and my brain doth reel!

Bear with me, father! Nay, thou devilish one,
  Why cam'st thou here to strike me dead with woe?
Turn round thy face and see what thou hast done!
  Fling back that cowl! Thy fateful features show!
Why hidest thou thy face? Alas, I rave—
My peerless knight, my love, is in the grave!

Mother divine, support me! O sweet Christ, to Thee
A stricken, lonely woman here doth bow.
Monk! Monk! What flashing eyes are those I see?
Strange stature hast thou gotten, even now!
Away!—I fear thee! What! in armor drest?
Dear lord, my husband, take me to thy breast!

IN THE CONFESSIONAL.

HAVE mercy on me, Lord! I heard a voice
That searched my soul and bade my heart rejoice.

And austere thoughts of holy, martyred men,
And blessed saints, departed from me then.

Sure, never voice so softly sweet was heard,
So like the morning love-song of a bird.

My life's young spring-time waked within my soul,
While years of penance backward seemed to roll,

And memory bloomed with blossoms of a day
When love was mine and life was careless play,

Such quality was in that bird-like tone
To wake delicious dreams and fancies flown.

The low confession fell upon mine ear,
The while I mused and scarcely leaned to hear

The venial sins of such a girlish heart,
Till, at one word, I felt my pulses start.

That word, abominable, dark as death,
Like sudden spectre froze my scanty breath.

Then soft and low a withering story came,
That seared my soul as with the touch of flame.

She told, in music sweet as cadenced rhyme,
An awful tale of perfidy and crime.

I looked to see from whence such whispers fell,
What writhing lips such ghastly tales could tell,

And saw a face as morning fresh and fair,
Framed in a nimbus soft of rippling hair.

Ego absolvo te. My heart grew sore
With love and pity. *Go, and sin no more.*

I watched her from the chancel trip away,
And with her fled the beauty of the day.

A cavalier, bold-eyed, stood there, and she
Let slip a sidelong glance of coquetry.

Retro Sathanas! Dark the shadows fall,
Mother of God on thy sweet name I call.

I love her, love her! Hark the tolling bell!
Have mercy Jesu! Save my soul from hell!

FELIS.

PUSS, curled on cushions, so demure and meek,
Content, luxurious, satisfied and sleek,
Thou mindest me of one I fain would seek.

Thou art so placid in thy robe of fur,
So sweet the music of thy gentle purr—
Dear puss, I fear thou dost resemble her.

Such dreamy depths are in thy sleepy eyes,
So like the wondrous calm of summer skies,
They, too, remind me of the ones I prize.

Thou art so perfect, supple, and so still,
Lazily beautiful when thou hast thy will,
Soft, smooth—yea, sinister! and prone to kill.

For thou hast gifts to make thy lovers quail;
Powers to make a suitor's spirit fail;
Latent capacities of tooth and nail.

Like her? I know not. Puss, resolve to me:
What if a mouse enamored was of thee,
And sought to please thee, loving copiously?

Thou wouldst respond, methinks thy purring saith,
With low, sweet sounds of hot, bewildering breath,
And, at the end—a sharp and cruel death.

I am no mouse, but just as helpless quite;
Pauline, with eyes serene as stars at night,
Doth fill my soul with fearful, strange delight.

Such thrills roll off her wealth of auburn hair
That one to touch its tangles should beware;
But, O my soul! she is most marvelous fair.

So great the mystery of her glorious eyes,
Such unguessed depth her beauty underlies,
That yet I tremble, fearing some surprise.

In manhood's strength I stand, yet shaken so
With memories of Pauline, that I must know
Unheard of bliss, or unimagined woe.

And can she love? Yea, more than demons hate!
And will she love? Aye, rarely, soon or late!
And me? I'll go and read that riddle straight.

TATTING.

WITH figure demure, and downcast face,
And a tranquil air of quiet grace,
Her delicate fingers deftly wrought
A pattern as fine as a fairy's thought,
Tatting that day!

O maiden fair, with the silken hair,
And the shining eyes of a lustre rare,
What abracadabra, mysterious spell
Is thy flying shuttle weaving so well,
Tatting to-day?

Ah, sir, I work to have my way
In the perfumed air of a gracious day;
My nimble fingers are weaving a snare
To entangle human hearts. Beware
Of my tatting to-day!

So the lily fingers, entrancing, flew,
And the lustrous eyes were heavenly blue;
And the silken hair was shot with gold,
And down in a golden glory rolled,
Tatting that day.

And she had her will on a gracious day,
All clad in a cloud of white array;
And I bless the day and the perfumed air
That kissed her cheek as she wove her snare,
Tatting that day.

VERONICA.

Veronica, Duchess of St. Giuliana, having cause for jealousy, sent her rival's head to her husband in a basket.—*Florentine History.*

STAY, Curzio! Could'st thou find it in thy heart
To win thy lady's favor by some deed
Bold, dangerous and sudden; such a part
As in the playing doth some courage need,
And nerve, and—glittering steel?
My Curzio! Well I know thee, brave and leal!

My lord the Duke of late hath careless grown;
No matter—it is naught. He hunts to-day.
Time was—ah, well! his pleasures are his own.
He hath perhaps been somewhat *more* than gay—
Gay, said I? By my soul
I shall requite him with relentless dole!

There is a woman, Curzio, thin and white,
With poor, moon eyes the Duke doth deem divine;
And hair all colorless as noon-day light . . . .
Ah, thou would'st better like such hair as mine!
But yet he *loveth* her.
By heavens! but the man doth greatly err!

I care not any whit except for this:
That so this woman trenches on my state.
I have no care for love's sake, certain 'tis
I hate my spouse with lavish, wifely hate . . . .
Curzio, heed not these sighs,
But thou art handsome with thy dangerous eyes,

And nervous strength, and mouth set firm and square
To do what deeds are urgent. Curzio, mine,
Methinks thou art most comely. Now, beware,
Lest high-born ladies' hearts respond to thine
And peril comes thereby.
Peril! to thee! what scorn is in thine eye!

Dost truly like me, Curzio? Well—perchance—
But yet I know not—would'st thou serve me well?
Ah, now I see the lightning in thy glance!
Thou would'st, for me, descend through gates of hell!
Curzio, I fain would know,
Could any pallid woman stir thee so?

My eyes are not pale moons to weep withal!
What seest thou in them, so, in still repose?
Yea, mighty love for those my friends I call,
And hatred, dark and deadly, for my foes!
And—listen—hand on sword!
Murder, my Curzio! Dost thou hear the word?

That woman—*Kill her!* Cut me off her head!
Off with it straight and bring it here to me!
Pale, ghastly, grinning, dripping, splashed with red,
What, losel, tremblest thou? Nay, now I see
Thou has the nerve to slay!
The sooner shalt thou conquer love!—away!

A ROMANCE OF THE JERSEYS.

WHEN Lord Cornwallis with his Hessians came,
(Beer-loving warriors in coats of flame)
To overrun, with savage war's turmoil,
New Jersey's sacred, vermeil-tinted soil;
The worthy Dutchmen (let us still be just,
The Hessians only came because they must)
Fought but half-hearted, lacking Rhenish cheer;
Three thousand miles removed from lager bier;
Athirst within a land where Ehret's name
Was yet unknown to hops and malt and fame:
And sought, with longings vast, a beverage
Their drouthy Teuton cravings to assuage.
They found one drink to rest their souls upon,
Old-fashioned Jersey lightning—apple-John.

Much valor lieth in a glass or two
Of that seductive tap of golden hue;
Much stupor followeth if one, unaware,
Absorbeth more than is a seemly share.
Ye who have known its dear, delusive ways,
Will bear me witness when I speak its praise.

A small detachment of Kniphausen's corps,
With maiden swords as yet unsteeped in gore,
Encamped at Bohnamtown one summer's day,
Fatigued with marching on a dusty way.
And after nightfall, two, whose throats were dry,
Stole through the picket-guards their luck to try;
And found, by dint of searching carefully,
A puncheon of superior V. O. P.:
With hearts made joyous by one sample sip,
A long, preliminary, generous nip,
They started campward, jovial, blithe and gay,
The moon's pale splendor lighting up their way.
While oft was heard a rippling soft and low,
A gurgle, gurgle, like a streamlet's flow.

Smooth was the liquor, velvety and old,
Its fire unguessed, its potency untold.
And still they drank until the moonlit trees
Began to caper to the evening breeze;
The virgin moon chasséed in wanton guise;
And all the stars shook laughter from the skies;
The road grew wavy, then uprose to meet
The highest stepping of their foolish feet;
And all creation left the beaten track,
Responsive to the spells of apple-Jack.
At length a barn they spied, and through the door
They stumbled in, and then they knew no more.
The solemn Night her shadowy flag unfurled,
And slumber fell upon the silent world.

The hours passed by, and Morning, bright and sweet,
Came down the eastern hills with rosy feet;
But still the Hessians in deep stupor lay,
Nor knew what beauty garlanded the day;
Until, at length, a ringing voice was heard
Within the open door, at which they stirred,
And woke, with many a stretch and many a yawn,
To find their muskets and their trappings gone.
A beardless youth they saw before them stand,
With mien determined and with gun in hand;
A beardless youth with sunny face and fair,
But with a fearless eye and gallant air;
One captured musket o'er his back was slung,
While from his shoulder all their trappings hung.

"Arise, base hirelings of a tyrant king!"
"Eh?—Nein!—Ve shust stay here like aferyding."
"Arise at once!" The tone was resolute—
"Oh, vell, dots all right oph you dond geshoot."
"You are my prisoners!" Scarce the merry youth
Could check his laughter at the scene uncouth;
The easy-tempered Deutschers, half asleep,
Their lazy panic and there deference deep—
"Your brizners, eh? Mein cracious! iss dot zo?
Und vare you wants, mein lieber, dot ve go?"
"Come forth at once!" "Oh, ya!—ve come hereowet?"
"Yes, come 'hereowet' quickly! Face about!
Now, forward march!" and off the prisoners went,
While close behind, to hasten and torment,

The prodding bayonet in the captor's hand
Brought quick assent to every sharp demand.

The road was dusty and the journey long;
The sun's bright, morning rays grew fierce and strong;
And such strange, Hessian oaths were heard that day,
That delicate wild-flowers growing by the way,
And violets blue, that graced the green road-side,
Hung their sweet heads in horror, drooped and died,
Withered by words too awful for belief;
I would repeat them but my page is brief.

At noon that day young Captain Parker stood
Within the grateful shadow of a wood,
Surrounded by his patriot company,
Standing at ease in groups of two and three;
The while he questioned of the youth who brought
The Hessian prisoners, how the men were caught.
The simple story in few words was told;
The speaker fearless, but not over bold;
The color mantling on his smooth young face,
His fine eyes sparkling with a lurking trace
Of mirth he seemed unwilling to betray;
And, at the end, he turned his face away;
A little bashful as he met the gaze
Of Parker's eye, and heard his words of praise.

"You have done well!" the gallant Captain said.
The youth made no reply but bowed his head.

"And you shall be a soldier, sir, and face
These hireling caitiffs of an alien race
On fields of battle, 'mid the stirring strife
That wakes heroic souls to glorious life!
Our country, in her hour of peril, needs
Brave hearts like yours to execute brave deeds.
Promotion waits you in my company,—
What say you, sir, and will you serve with me?"

The youth seemed puzzled. O'er his face a tide
Of crimson rushed. "I cannot!" he replied.
"You cannot?" On the Captain's face a frown
Grew dark. The trembling youth looked down;
Then turned distressed, as seeking other aid;
Then flamed the falsehood forth: "I am afraid!"
The Captain's bold, black eyes were full of scorn:
"Afraid! A word of utter baseness born!
Then, sir, take off those brave accoutrements!
Off with them straight! I will have no pretence,
Nor see a soldier's trappings so disgraced,
Upon the shoulders of a coward placed!"

The youth recoiled as smitten with a blow,
And from his handsome face the ruddy glow
Faded to deathly pallor, and his eyes
Filled with hot tears of anger and surprise.
With hasty, trembling, unaccustomed hands,
He tore away the hateful belts and bands;
And panting with a passionate unrest,

Faced round with flashing eyes and heaving breast.
What shade has fallen on Captain Harry's face?
'Tis he that now seems stricken with disgrace.

A moment's silence, while no sound was heard
Save the soft twittering of a heedless bird;
Then Captain Harry fell upon his knee,
And doff'd his hat in all humility;
And shamed through all his soul he could but say:
"Your pardon, mistress, at your feet I lay
The homage of a soldier, rude and blind,
Who yet knows how to honor womankind."

It matters not to tell what more was said:
It is one hundred years since they were wed.

MASK AND DOMINO.

IRENE DA VENTIMIGLIA AND THE DUCHESS MORELLA.

MY lady Irene thou art wan to-night,
And yet, but now, beneath thy domino,
Methought thine eyes were marvelously bright.
I did not think to find thee trembling so;
Come, come, take heart of grace—
What! Dreadest thou to see a woman's face?

A man's would suit thee best! Well, I did think
A little frolic would have plagued thee naught;
I did not look to see thee wince and shrink
At my unmasking. Tell me now thy thought:
Doth not this page's gear
Of blood-red crimson well become me, dear?

Still pale and silent? What strange thing is this?
These are my lord's apartments, and I think
Somewhere there must be wine. Ah yes, here 't is.
These tears of Christ will help thee. Sweetheart, drink!
Let us be merry, dear,
In Lachryma Christi drown each doubt and fear.

How I did fool thee, child! Forgive my glee,
I cannot choose but laugh.... 'T was writ this way:
"Irene, my sweet, one waits who worships thee,
And this the token: Love me, love, I pray!"
Now was it not so writ?
What chance did favor me in guessing it?

O, thou coquette! Thou sly, demure coquette!
Nay, sweet Marchesa, I condemn thee not.
I am myself no prude, and yet—and yet—
No sin is quite so sinful till found out.
It is one thing to sin,
It is another to be caught therein.

Oh, I have noted how my lord of late
Hath sued thy favor—but I count it naught;
'Tis what we look for in the marriage state—
Is't not, Marchesa? Dost thou sorrow aught
When thy good lord doth stray?
Thou dost not fret, I warrant. Well-a-day!

I do remember—laughable it seems—
  How once the Duke—ha! ha!—did swear to me
That my blue eyes were brighter than bright dreams;
  But, faith, it was but lover's gallantry,
    For now he doth entreat
Thy twilight hair and dusk eyes darkly sweet.

Art ill, dear friend? Dost feel the need of air?
  I'll throw this casement open to the night....
'Tis strange how men do value eyes and hair!
  So!—Is not yon fair planet wondrous bright?
    What mournful sounds prevail!
Is it the moonlight makes thee look so pale?

How lovely is the moon's serene, sweet face!
  No woman hath such beauty, yet, alway,
Men have no eyes for aught but woman's grace;
  Strange, is it not? And, stranger still, to-day
    The face they loveliest call,
To-morrow hath no loveliness at all.

What wretched creatures we—that live to make
  The sport of men; and each new lover seems
Too fond and true a loving heart to break;
  Then comes the day that shatters all our dreams,
    And, at the bitter end,
We learn to hate each lover and each friend.

Look out upon the hushed and breathless night.
The tranquil stars alone are always true.
What's this? A storm has quenched their steadfast light.
That flash was fearful! See, the lights burn blue.
'Tis ominous, my dear,
This sudden, dreadful storm—hast thou no fear?

Marchesa, dearest, surely thou art ill!
That wine has hurt thee? Is it so? Alas!
Fool! I did give it thee with right good will!
With mine own hand I did prepare that glass!
'Twill do its work full well!
'Twill send thee straight to heaven, my dear—or hell!

Aha! My time has come! I am his wife!
I am the woman that he swore to love!
And, traitress, thou dost pay me with thy life
For this intrigue! Yea, by the saints above,
Thy life is small requite
For all the hate I've smothered till this night!

That letter—'t was the Duke's!—and this the place
The treacherous schemer for a trysting gave!
Yea, writhe and moan and hide thy livid face!
And die, and rot in a dishonored grave!
He'll find thee here anon
A festering corpse, thou wanton—ah! she's gone!

DECORATION DAY.

COMRADES, the time seems far away
That saw us marshaled for the fray,
And dim the memory of that day,
Like an old story;
For peace hath conflicts year by year,
That waste the soul and scar and sear,
And some of us are maimed, I fear,
Yet miss the glory.

And it is well, as swift years flee,
To fan the flame of memory,
And sometimes call to mind that we,
Mid cannon's rattle,
In those dark days of doubt and gloom,
Defied the shadow of the tomb,
Fronted the thunder and the doom,
And marched to battle.

Amid the cares that weigh us down,
Let us, for once, put on the crown,
And claim the glory and renown,
And proudly claim it:
Once *we* were heroes! Let us be
Stronger to meet adversity,
More faithful to that memory,
Nor ever shame it.

So shall the fortunate ones who fell
Be honored more and honored well,
With whiter wreaths of immortelle,
And worthier mourning.
But yet we are not mourners—nay,
We strew their graves with flowers to-day,
With brightest blossoms of the May,
A brave adorning.

No cypress leaves, no weeds of woe,
No solemn funeral dirges slow,
No anguished moaning, sad and low,
No passionate weeping;
But with glad hearts and hands we bring
These splendors of the wakened spring,
Their fame alone remembering,
Their laurels keeping.

Bring flowers, then, and every year
Renew these memories strong and clear,
And teach your children to revere
The golden story;
Nor let them ever turn away
From graves of gallant boys in gray,
Brave foes they were—their tombs array
With equal glory.

THE INDICATOR.

A SONG, a psalm, an upward note,
A rapid, joyous *click! click! click!*
And *click! click! click!*
As animated, full, and quick,
As any trill from thrush's throat,
And up the bubbles rise and float.

What song is this the siren sings,
That charms the fishes in the sea?
That from the fragrant meadow brings
The lambs that gambol friskily?
A tuneless song, but oh, how strong
To gather hearers short and long,
And fill the sails of yonder boat,
And make the bubbles rise and float!

The tide is rising, get on board!
The wind is blowing fair;

The crew are all of one accord,
To sail a glittering land toward.
Come, faithful souls, and get on board!
  The dapper crew, so debonair,
Are very sure, extremely sure,
The pleasant weather will endure.

Oh, what a ship! Her silken sails
Are swept along by perfumed gales;
Her merry crew, the long day through,
  Make much ado, and dance and sing;
For on a little way before
There lies a golden, glittering shore.
  Clap hands, and make the welkin ring,
  Ye merry crew, carouse and sing!
But saw ye not, oh blind, blind, blind,
The wolfish faces left behind?

* * * * *

A change of tone! a *click!—click!—click!*
Slow-dropping like a death-watch tick;
A dismal, gloomy *click!—click!—click!*
  Whereat the radiant atmosphere
Assumes a livid, sickly hue,
And droops in ragged fringes blue;
A tone that scares the lambs at play,
And sends them scurrying far away
To safety on the upland lea,
And frights the fishes in the sea;
Then sullen waves their fronts uprear,
And bubbles break and disappear.

Ah, where the ship that sailed away
For golden shores, with streamers gay,
And merry crew who surely knew
That summer skies were always blue?
Ah, waves that roll, and winds that moan,
And broken spars that creak and groan!
And drowning men, on billows high,
Who turn white faces to the sky!

A KISS.

AH, rosebud mouth, for kisses made,
And are you not the least afraid?
And do you know, my little one,
What mischief kisses sweet have done?
O'er all the world and through all time,
In every age and every clime,
Men have kissed women's mouths, and still,
Through every coming age they will,
While rolls the world the ether through.
What then? That should I not tell you.

I love you, darling, but I know
What way the summer zephyrs blow.
And you love me, but in your heart
Love sitteth, pensive and apart,
Demure, serene, and lost in dreams
Of all that is and all that seems.
You know not even why it is
That you are startled by a kiss.

But I, a veteran, scarred and worn,
On battle surges tossed and torn,
And scorched by passion's fiery breath;
I that have been play-mate with death,
And mocked the heavy hand of fate,
And plumbed the depths of love and hate;
I know, my little, star-eyed miss,
Why devils laugh when mortals kiss.

Alas, and who shall count the cost
Of human souls, for love's sake lost?
For peasant's hut, and kingly crown,
And rural dell, and stately town,
And vineyards ripening in the sun,
And kingdoms by the strong arm won,
And armies marshalled for the fray,
Have been o'erthrown and swept away,
Betrayed and wrecked and lost for this
The heedless harvest of a kiss.

Nathless, but there is loss and gain;
And oft a kiss hath banished pain,
And dowered the world with splendid light,
And flushed the day with beauty bright,
And bade the earth and sea and sky
Take rapturous heed that heaven is nigh;
And since the first, sad soul was lost,
Not one has stopped to count the cost.

What then? Why then I kiss you dear,
And kiss away that trembling tear.
What need for me to say, my sweet,
What serpents sting unwary feet?
If storms are gathering let them break;
Yea, if the starry heavens quake,
And suns are quenched, and if the world
To crashing ruin should be hurled,
On verge of vast eternity
I'd kiss you, kiss you, what care we?

PORTRAIT OR SPECTRE?

NAY, why that look of cold distrust? I vow,
One might believe that on my gloomy brow
A threat hung scowling. Put away thy fear,
For not a thought of mischief brings me here;
And what thou seest is but Care's black mark
Writ on my face by sorrows deep and dark.
Is Joy thy playmate that thou canst not see
Grief's pallor without shrinking timidly?

Painter, I have great need to try thy skill.
It may be that thou canst assuage my ill
By painting for me, with thy deftest touch,
A woman's portrait. Certes, it is much!
A woman, but her beauty so supreme
Thou shouldst have power to illustrate a dream—
Was e'er caprice to so much passion wed?—
Sittings? I told thee, painter, she is dead!

Yes, she is dead—but if it were not so
Her perfect features thou could'st never show.
But wake thy soul and search for some fine thing;
Paint thou the shimmer of an angel's wing;
Or some rare gem outflashing all the East,
Guarded and worshipped by some fabled beast;
Paint any bright, bewildering mystery,
It shall resemble her in some degree.

Paint an idea. This the scene in brief:
A vast, wide plain, more desolate than grief;
A cold, pale star, set brilliantly on high;
A flash of lightning hissing through the sky;
A pale aurora rising to the view,
With splendors of Vesuvius shining through—
Alas! there is no pertinence in these,
At best they are but bare realities.

Paint me a sign of Hope or Faith or Death;
The things whereto men cling with latest breath;
A saint, white-stoled and pointing to the skies;
A serpent, with enchanting, subtle eyes—
Stay, paint a woman! All else would be in vain,
These but the signs and symbols of her reign;
A woman, tender, passionate and true—
Aye, there's the doubtful point! Would God I knew.

I will describe her, painter. Take thy stand
And with swift touches paint as I command.
Draw an interior—listen to me well—
And paint a form more fair than words can tell,
A shape exquisite, of a dainty grace,
And paint a beautiful, perilous, treacherous face
Grown ghastly with a sudden, white surprise
To see her lover slain before her eyes!

Stay, stay; go not! These idle dreams are naught,
Her memory doth disturb and shake my thought;
And strange, wild fancies from my sorrows grow,
The very sky is draped with weeds of woe;
The world is darkened with a pall of ills,
And pale Remorse sits brooding on the hills.
Thou canst not serve me! Nothing will atone!
My passion, grief and madness are mine own!

REASON AND FAITH.

THY love lies there and cannot rise,
A film upon her frozen eyes,
And stark and cold her beauty rare,
And all her silky ringlets fair
Are naught but lifeless tufts of hair.
Weep, weep and moan!

My love looks down from Paradise
With comfort in her pitying eyes,
My love, my own!

Thy love is dead; cold, pale and still,
In coffined silence white and chill;
And all that lieth here to-day
Shall soon forever pass away;
Nor yet in heaven or earth shall stay
One vestige dim.

My love shall walk in heavenly ways,
And sing glad songs of love and praise
Mid seraphim.

Thou fool! This mechanism fine,
Like delicate flower or clustering vine,
Doth cease to work and that is all;
The stately, spreading palm shall fall,
Thou, too, shalt answer to the call,
And all is sped.

Oh thou sweet spirit, wandering far,
I would I knew to what fair star
Thy soul hath fled.

Thy faith and hope are phantasy;
Dumb nature laughs and pities thee;
The faith thy poor self-love requires,
The hope thy vanity inspires
Of after life and angel choirs,
Are vain, all vain.

Oh love, methinks I feel thee near.
Is thy dear presence hovering here,
To ease my pain?

Thy dog hath faculties like thine
In less degree of clear and fine;
The same machinery doth wake
His duller thought; hath he no stake
In heavenly bliss or burning lake
Beyond the skies?

I know not who thou art, I know
My love waits for me in the glow
Of Paradise.

I am pure Reason, swift and bright
To chase the phantom shades of night.
Awake, thou dreamer! rise and be
Erect and helpful, strong and free,
Nor wave arms to Eternity
In hopeless plaint!

Oh love, my love, I see thee there,
Triumphant, holy, calm and fair,
A ransomed saint!

LOVE'S WORLD.

"Love builds triumphal arches on desert sands."

WE sat upon the yellow sands
With tremulous hearts and clinging hands,
The while, from far off foreign lands,
The billows rolled—behold! behold!
The sea, a merchant brave and bold,
Hath brought, oh bounteous, great sea,
Such treasures to my love and me!

A splendor of seraphic hue,
O'erhung with heaven's imperial blue,
Dreams, messages and fancies new,
A flood of light, soft, warm and bright,
A dream of sensuous, dear delight,
A dream, oh shimmering, shining sea,
Of empire for my love and me.

The world is ours Love seems to say.
Oh world, thou hast been given away
By lavish Love, this perfect day.
No soul is nigh to make reply,
Alone with earth and sea and sky!
What message from the isles, oh sea?
What tidings for my love and me?

What tidings from the northern seas,
Where curdling billows roll and freeze,
And white death lurks in every breeze;
And cold and green, in icy sheen,
The bergs lift frozen fronts serene,
Like gravestones o'er thy grave, oh sea?
Nay, keep this from my love and me.

Nor tell us of thy stormy days,
When, through the swirling, watery ways,
The ghosts of drownèd men upraise
Their faces white, aghast with fright,
On threshold of the realms of night.
Tell not, oh ravenous, cruel sea,
Such tidings to my love and me.

But of the odorous Indian isles,
Where earth, a scented nymph, beguiles
With shining tears or glittering smiles

To dance and song, or dalliance long,
Or passions swift and dark and strong.
Come whisper, oh thou tell-tale sea,
Romances to my love and me.

And tell of blue waves tossed and curled,
Wherethrough, with snowy wings unfurled,
Brave ships go sailing down the world;
Each dipping prow, with courtly bow
Saluting thee, a monarch thou,
Whose kingdom, at our feet, oh sea,
Ends here before my love and me.

Oh, thou great wanderer, bold and free!
Thou hidest many a mystery,
And desperate deeds thou dost decree;
But Love, to-day, in wanton play,
Thou knowest hath given the world away;
And so thou crawlest here, oh sea,
Submissive to my love and me.

APOTHEOSIS.

IN dream or waking revery,
I know not which it chanced to be,
Or flash of vivid prophecy,
I soared afar
Beyond the farthest, burning star.

Before a glory white and great,
Two souls, unwitting of their fate,
Knelt down in silence to await
What dread decree
Might shape their long eternity.

And kindly death who brought them there,
A presence noble, calm and fair,
With shadows in his twilight hair,
Dropt into space
With lifted eyes and tranquil face.

No word the perfect silence broke,
No flashing wing, no pinion's stroke;
No seraph's hymn the far depths woke,
But hovering there
An expectation filled the air.

The one was visaged like to those
Who calmly face unnumbered foes,
Who suffer unimagined woes,
And rise above
All chains of sense for faith or love.

She spoke: "I loved, and this my woe
I had so little to bestow;
But what I had I gave, and so,
I sinned and died.
I would have given worlds beside.

I gave myself, my life, my soul,
My hope of heaven; I gave the whole
For my love's sake—a piteous dole.
I am content
To suffer my due punishment."

The other was of feebler make,
Of those unknown to sword or stake,
For whom no storms of passion break,
Who never sound
The fiery depths of souls profound.

Trembling she said: "I loved him, too,
And faithfully, nor ever knew
What love forbidden dares to do,
For we were wed;
Judge then between us twain," she said.

"Nay, judge not!" was the other's cry,
"But on thy mercy we rely."
She ceased, the glory filled the sky,
While all around
The silent spaces woke to sound.

And suddenly, with beauty rare,
The upturned faces grew more fair;
Transfigured from the hue of care
To radiance bright,
Both crowned with equal crowns of light

And shining shapes, with pinions fleet,
The pardoned spirits thronged to greet;
While floating upward, faintly sweet
To listening ears,
Came music from the whispering spheres.

AN ANTIENT LEGEND

OF THE KNIGHT OF DORNE, THE BLACK STEED, AND THE LADYE IN GREEN AND CRIMSON.

THE Knight of Dorne prickt forth one summer's day
For to adventure in a certain wood,
Wherein he wote that he perchance might slay
Some necromancing dwarf or dragon's brood.
For Rumor had it that a hermit old
Who dwelt thereby of such like things had told.

Gaily he rode, rejoicing in the sight
Of earth and sky which pleasant were to see.
The old earth, now, hath grown less fair and bright,
And woxen gray and somber; and, pardie,
Ne dames (save one) are lovely now as then,
Nor shall we see thilk good old times agen.

Gaily he rode; the birds had wot of it,
And twittered of him in a merry wise;
(For then both birds and beasts had ampler wit,)
Quod they: "What doth the Knight of Dorne emprise?"
"He goeth on some knightly quest I weet."
So each to other sang with chirpings sweet.

Whenas unto the forest's marge he drew,
A squirrel, chattering, seemed to bid him stay;
(For even squirrels then some wisdom knew;)
Eftsones a stag, great-antlered, barred his way,
But when the knight came near, forthby he fled,
But threw back warning glances as he sped.

Anon an owl, day-blind, went hooting by,
To seek the dark shade of a bosky dell;
And then a raven with a hoarse, sad cry,
Beseeming of misfortune to foretell,
With black wing cleft the shadowy spaces dim
Of that wide forest with its secrets grim.

But all unweeting of these portents ill,
The knight rode on into the middle wood;
When so it fortuned that the air grew still,
And dark clouds gathered o'er the solitude,
Presaging thunder; then the fearless knight
Beheld a wondrous and a lovely sight.

A great, black, mettled steed with flaming eyes,
  Whereon there sat the semblaunt of a may,
With dainty limbs and eyes like summer skies,
  And hair, gold-hewen, lightly blown astray;
Untressed it shone in tangled splendor sweet;
A gown of green fell shimmering o'er her feet.

A crimson hood had slippen from her brows,
  And gave to view her parfit loveliness;
Her neck, ne wimpled, rivalled northern snows,
  Its hidden wonders weren rare to guess;
Her fiery steed she managed with a touch,
The good knight at her beauty marvelled much.

"Beau sire," she said, "It steads me well to see
  Thy valorous presence in this shadowy place.
I have been mured in sad captivity,
  From whennes I am escaped by Godys grace;
And eke been holpen by this noble steed,
Who gave me good deliverance in my need.

"Let me rest here, sith I aweary be,
  And rede thee all my mournful tale." With that
She gat her to the ground full lissomely,
  And down upon a mossy bank ysat;
Her champing steed stood by her, black as night,
The other charger ramped and raged with fright.

And when for courtesy the knight gat down,
His trembling horse did break from him and fly;
But the sweet ladye charmed away his frown;
Quod she: "What doth it matter? Thou and I
Can ride where'er thou wilt upon my steed,
And doubt not we shall make suffisaunt speed."

Then in that silent forest's twilight air
She told her tale, and with the witchery
Of three enchantments she bewitched him there;
Three spells she had of potent glamoury.
The storm meanwhile, which erst had swept afar,
Came rolling nearer on its gloomy car.

The spell of starry eyes ywroughten well,
A voice that charmed with rippling melody,
The malefice of touches soft, that fell
From rosy fingers, these her witcheries three;
And strangely sweet and soverainly were they
To lead that brave and simple soul astray.

And sure his stainless knighthood had been lost,
But heaven's good grace prevailed to succor him;
The storm broke forth, on driving whirlwinds tost,
And blinding flashes lit the forest dim.
Ho! ho! by this the knight of Dorne hath seen
A cloven foot beneath her gown of green!

He rose in wrath. Her face had woxen white,
  Beneath the fierce glare of the angry skies;
Reason and sense returned unto the knight;
  Out flashed his sword, upliften meteor-wise,
A dolorous stroke he fetched, with thunderous frown,
And swift he clave her through the middle down.

Ladye and steed yvanished in a flame;
  When lo! the smile returned to nature's face;
The good knight's charger toward him trotting came,
  And gruefully he turned and left that place.
Betid that as he mused before him stood
In sober guise the hermit of the wood:

To whom he told the tale. The hermit said:
  "My son, by help of heaven thou hast done well.
That charmeresse, by cozening seemly-head,
  Hath lured full many a wight to death and hell.
This learn and, knowing, let them pass afar,
Crimson and green the devil's colors are."

So runs the legend, dim with centuries' dust;
  The Knight of Dorne achieved a mighty name,
And did great deeds in many a merry joust,
  But doubtful is the record of his fame;
His day was so remote and far away,
That what his ending was I cannot say.

But this is sure, that at the present day
  All colors serve to paint the devil's screen;
And many a may beguileth men astray
  Who walketh not in crimson nor in green.
Truth is, all women underneath the sun
Do somewhat deal in Satan's wiles—save one.

COUSIN FLOY.

NOW mind, Miss Grey, your name to-night
Is Marie Antoinette;
You've been promoted, just for once,
To wear a crown, my pet.
And pray remember who you are,
Be stately, proud and fair,
And let no curious folks suspect
That you are stuffed with hair.

It isn't every doll that's let
Go to a masquerade;
To dance and have ice-cream and cake
And nuts and lemonade.
You'll meet distinguished folks, my dear,
Kings, queens and courtiers gay;
But bear in mind and don't let on
That it is only play.

And come away before daylight,
  And tell me all the news;
Don't notice clown nor pantaloon,
  And don't run down your shoes.
Don't dance with any common dolls,
  But be discreet, my lamb;
You might, if it should happen right,
  Just bring me home some jam.

One thing I must insist upon,
  And don't forget it, please:
You're not to flirt the least wee bit,
  No, not a bit—don't tease.
For many a doll that once was gay
  And light of heart, my pet,
Has in a cold ash-barrel found
  The fate of a coquette.

Do you remember Cousin Floy?
  Why, yes; of course you do;
We loved her dearly, didn't we?
  She made a hat for you.
She was so pretty and so sweet,
  But flirted, mama said;
I don't exactly understand,
  I only know she's dead.

She went away—I can't just think
  Whatever made her go.
You need n't cry because I do—
  But then I loved her so.
Before she went her dear, sweet face
  Grew so extremely white—
I guess we won't play masquerade.
  Now go to sleep. Good night.

FROST PICTURES.

THE sun above the icy rim
That ringed the world around,
Arose and scattered shining gems
By millions on the ground;
And every icicle that hung
Point downward to the snow,
Was jeweled like a fairy's wand,
With rainbow hues aglow.

Then little Tom jumped out of bed,
From dreams of Santa Claus:
"To-morrow will be Christmas Day!"
And gave the clothes a toss;
And to the frosted window ran
To see what he could see:
"Oh, my! What wonderland is this
Of splendid mystery?"

A land of snow and ice indeed,
But beautiful and strange;
A scene of shifting, iris tints,
That glow and fade and change;
A landscape of the frigid zone,
All white as white could be,
And trees festooned with frosted vines
Of silver filagree.

And in the midst a palace rose,
With crystal turrets clear;
And one stupendous, shining dome,
That glistened far and near.
While like Aladdin's bridal home,
Built up with genii care,
From every glittering casement shone
Prismatic jewels rare.

And underneath the frosted trees,
The silver arches through,
Strange, pigmy figures seemed to pass
The palace gates unto;
Long-bearded men of stature small,
In furry garments dressed,
All white and hoary-haired and slow
And queer and self-possessed.

And each one as he passed within
The shining palace door,
Upon his ancient, sturdy back,
Some precious burden bore.
Tom looked and looked and looked again—
What could the picture mean?—
Till all at once, with throbbing heart,
He recognized the scene.

"It is the home of Santa Claus,
Far up in northern snows!"
Cried Tommy, "And this very night
With reindeer team he goes,
Swift-speeding o'er the sleeping land,
To bring to girls and boys
Their Christmas gifts of skates and sleds
And knives and dolls and toys.

"And oh!" said Tom, "I mean to wait
And see him start to-night"—
But even as he spoke the scene
Grew less distinct and bright;
The glowing sun the frost dissolved,
Turned it to mist again—
A memory in a boyish heart,
A shadow on the pane.

PREHISTORIC SMITH.

QUATERNARY EPOCH—POST-PLIOCENE PERIOD.

A MAN sat on a rock and sought
Refreshment from his thumb;
A dinotherium wandered by
And scared him some.

His name was Smith. The kind of rock
He sat upon was shale.
One feature quite distinguished him—
He had a tail.

The danger past, he fell into
A revery austere;
While with his tail he whisked a fly
From off his ear.

"Mankind deteriorates," he said,
"Grows weak and incomplete;
And each new generation seems
Yet more effete.

"Nature abhors imperfect work,
And on it lays her ban;
And all creation must despise
A tailless man.

"But fashion's dictates rule supreme,
Ignoring common sense;
And fashion says, to dock your tail
Is just immense.

"And children now come in the world
With half a tail or less;
Too stumpy to convey a thought,
And meaningless.

"It kills expression. How can one
Set forth, in words that drag,
The best emotions of the soul,
Without a wag?"

Sadly he mused upon the world,
Its follies and its woes;
Then wiped the moisture from his eyes,
And blew his nose.

But clothed in ear-rings, Mrs. Smith
  Came wandering down the dale;
And, smiling, Mr. Smith arose,
  And wagged his tail.

PRO AND CON.

WHEN ships come over the sea, my love,
Come over the shining sea,
Like maidens walking a minuet,
White-raimented daintily;
Oh what do they bring under each white wing,
What songs do the sailors sing,
While the breezes frolic along the deep,
And the crested billows behind them sweep,
As over the sea, the shining sea,
The ships come sailing so merrily?

When ships come over the sea, my dear,
Come over the stormy sea,
The cordage creaks in the whistling winds,
And the sails flap dismally,
And the sailors swear, till the raw, damp air
Is visibly tinged with a sulphurous glare,
And the seasick passengers faintly groan,
And the sea-gulls scream, and the wild winds moan,
As over the sea, the storm-swept sea,
The ships come laboring wearily.

LIFE AND CHARACTER.

FROM A DOGGY'S POINT OF VIEW.

I 'M a little curly doggy for a cent,
(So Mabel says) as black as doggies come;
I wag my tail at every compliment,
Like "itty toozy woozy umpty scrum";
My eyes are black, so is my cold, wet nose,
I 'm littler than a minute I suppose.

Some say I 'm mischievous and some say funny;
I *have* to bite things, but it 's only play;
I used to have fine sport with Mabel's bunny,
Until the poky fellow died one day;
Then Mabel cried, and I was really sorry
For fear the poor, weak creature died of worry.

I 'm very busy, for I know it 's true
That idleness inclines to sinful ways;
And every minute has its work to do—
My industry is "frightful" Mabel says;
Gloves, shoes, and things too numerous to mention
Require a deal of serious attention.

Mabel is silly. Such a hat she wore
Of flowers and feathers and things—it made me sick!
But I got hold of it one day and tore
The ugly thing to pieces pretty quick.
She cried again—she cries too easy quite;
I only know that what I did was right.

I wish my lot with other dogs was cast;
I met a gentlemanly large one lately.
After the usual compliments had passed
I barked, and bit his ear, while he, sedately,
Replied by an occasional sleepy wink.
Large dogs are more humane than folks I think.

A little human has but lately come,
I don't know where it came from, nor for what;
A dozen growns would be less troublesome,
And yet it seems a comic little tot;
I like to chew its wee, pink, chubby toes;
It says: "Ah goo," and likes it, I suppose.

Miss Lou is Mabel's cousin, I believe:
A young man called on her the other night,
And tried to keep her warm with just his sleeve;
Such foolish actions don't, to me, seem right.
If I am wrong his pardon I must beg,
He tried to eat her and I bit his leg.

I like the humans, and in all I do
I strive to win their love with all my might:
Mabel and baby and mamma and Lou,
I love 'em all and try to do what 's right.
I haven't any more to say just now;
I 'm going to curl up on this rug, bow wow!

I WANT.

I WANT—I don't know what I want; I'm tired of everything;
I'd like to be a queen or something—no, a bearded king,
With iron crown and wolfish eyes and manners fierce and bold,
Or else a plumed highwayman, or a paladin of old.

We girls are such poor creatures, slaves of circumstance and fate;
Denied the warrior's glory and the conqueror's splendid state;
And, puss, you are so mortal slow; I wish you could be changed
Into a catamount, with tastes quite violent and deranged.

I'd like an earthquake, that I would—oh, puss, I'll tell you what,
Some planets have two suns and different colors, too, at that;

Now there would be variety: two mornings every day—
One green or brown, for instance, and the other crimson, say.

What splendid lights, what curious shades, what transformation scenes;
What queer surprises, puss, just think, what lovely pinks and greens!
How funny Gus would look! He is so poky and so flat.
But such complexions! After all, I shouldn't fancy that.

I'll never marry Gus, of that I'm very sure at least,
I'd sooner be a bandit's bride, united by a priest . . . .
Oh, there you are, sir! No, indeed! I'll not be kissed at all!
No, sir, I've changed my mind; we *wont* be married in the fall.

Now *do* be still. I've changed my mind. My privilege, I believe——
Oh, horrible! What's this? A daddy-long-legs on my sleeve!
Oh, Gus, come quick! I'm deadly faint! Do take the thing away!
Yes, yes, I'll promise *anything!* I'll marry you to-day!

COASTING.

COME out into the moonlit night,
With muff and tippet, dear;
The stars are laughing down at us,
The air is keen and clear—
So keen and clear that life and health
Throb high in every vein.
Away with languid, silken ease,
And sparkle of champagne!
Come out, love! Come out, love!
Come out in coasting gear!
With fur-topped boots and stockings red,
And redder cheeks, my dear.

Give me your little hand in mine,
We 'll climb the hill together;
To climb is easy as to sing,
This splendid winter weather.
The world is like an ice-king's bride,
All raimented in white;
The icy palaces shall ring
With bridal songs to-night.

Old gaffer Care, the poor old soul,
Hath cast his wares away;
Hark to the sleigh-bells chorusing
A jubilate gay!

Give voice, my dear, and carol forth
A song to fit the time;
Pour out in clear and joyous notes
A merry-footed rhyme.
The yellow moon leans low adown
From out the starry sky,
To hear the silvery sounds of mirth
And music floating by.
Now down we go, as swift and sure
As sea-gulls o'er the sea;
Or shooting stars that flashing fly
In spaces far and free.

The snow flies up in diamond-dust—
Take care, hold hard and fast!
A tingling shower of blinding snow—
Hurrah! Upset at last!
Such frolics chance to all who love
The swiftly flying sled,
And blinking stars alone beheld
That glimpse of stockings red.
Now home we go with hearts aglow,
And faces glad and bright;
Good angels keep you, little one!
Good-night, my love, good-night!

TABLEAUX.

THE sun of Austerlitz had set
  Behind the pantry door;
Napoleon sheathed his gleaming blade
  And laid it on the floor;
The Iron Mask took off his wig—
  It hurt his ear, he said;
And Queen Elizabeth removed
  Three-quarters of her head.

The next thing was Iniquitous,
  Which seemed to please them all;
And then we played The Prodigal,
  And then tableau'd The Fall;
But Snipes, who took the Serpent's part,
  Got hungry probably;
At least he ate The Apple up
  And quarreled with The Tree.

A larky spirit was abroad
  Which spoiled the serious things,
And led the girls to giggle at
  Apollyon's awful wings;
And when the final scene was set
  Of Mary Stuart's death,
Poor Mary was in such a gale
  She couldn't catch her breath.

A gloomy court, a headsman's block
  All hung with weeds of woe,
An Executioner in black,
  And tapers burning low;
A weird, funereal, solemn scene,
  Impressive, gloomy, dark;
With all the tragic retinue
  Just bursting for a lark.

Too bad! but Mary looked so sweet,
  And had such pretty hair,
The headsman leaned upon his ax
  And kissed her plump and square;
Then Perky Jones, the cowlèd monk,
  So grim, and stern, and slow,
Turned somersaults across the block
  And spoiled the whole tableau.

Then buzz of talk, and change of seats,
And laughter's merry peal,
Broke up the show, and all the boys
Took partners for a reel.
And we at Jones's Corners think
That trying to be jolly
Is better for the human race,
Than limp, æsthetic folly.

THE UNATTAINABLE.

IT chanced that as I wandered on my way,
One summer's day,
With thoughts that tended unto fancies quaint;
I came anear a streamlet running clear,
Like school-boy glad what time he flies restraint;
And on its brink
A pensive-minded ass had paused to think.

He stood reflective, gazing far away,
As who should say:
"This slumbrous summer noon is nowise fit
For aught of toil or any vain turmoil,
But in the lap of dreamy thoughts to sit,
And gather so
Such peace of mind as lazy asses know."

Quite lost in contemplation deep was he,
Nor heeded me;
One ear did somewhat droop. as with the weight
Of portly fly, which gravely hung thereby,
In seeming comfort and contentment great;
Nor deemed that he
Was otherwhere than eke a fly should be.

"O ass," I said, "what perfect rest is thine,
What peace benign!
Dost thou not know such pleasure cannot last?
Hast thou no fear of blows still due thee here
As debits on the page by fate forecast?"
He offered no reply,
But with his hind-foot calmly brushed that fly.

"O ass," I said, "the pleasant hours are few
Thy journey through.
Dost thou not dread what yet may come to pass?
Methinks, perchance, thine utter nonchalance
May be because, in truth, thou art an ass."
Thus I, in brief;
He naught, but used his tongue for handkerchief.

"O ass," I said, "canst thou not teach to me
Serenity,
And full enjoyment of the passing hour?
Without or vain regret, or ceaseless, weary fret,
Toward what future ills may darkly lower?"
He turned his head.
Full-solemn winkèd he, but no word said.

Nor have I ever learned the potent plan
From ass or man,
Of how to rest content with present good,
Without forebodings vain, or retrospective pain
To mar the most complacent, peaceful mood.
Nor is it true
That any folk but asses reach thereto.

SILVER-GLOSS AND TANGLE-FOOT.

SLEEPY little Toddlekins
In the corn-field lay;
Resting on a pumpkin vine,
Tired out with play;
Golden head on golden pillow
Dropped to sleep at last,
While the shades of afternoon
Slowly lengthened past.

Sunset faded, twilight melted
Into balmy night,
And the lazy, harvest moon
Slowly crept in sight;
The insect choir began to stir,
Each tuned his little flute,
And joining with the katydids,
Began the great dispute.

Little Toddlekins awoke,
  Scarce believed her eyes;
Sat up straight and looked about
  In a vast surprise;
All the corn-field was alive—
  Such a wondrous sight—
With a throng of fairy forms,
  In the moonshine bright.

Puzzled little Toddlekins,
  Wide-eyed, gazed around;
Came a princely cavalier,
  Bowing to the ground;
With a tasseled cap of gold
  And a cloak of green—
"Little Toddlekins," he said,
  "Will you be my queen?

"I'm the king of corn-field fays,
  Silver-Gloss my name;
These my peers and paladins
  Of honorable fame;
These my subjects—will you be
  Their queen and mine?" said he—
"I ask it on my bended knees."
  "If you please," said she.

He took her hand with courtly grace,
And led her to his throne;
See how very, very small
Toddlekins has grown;
All her wonder at an end,
Quietly sedate,
Like a born princess she seemed
In her royal state.

And then what games and sports went on,
What dances and what fun;
What races on unsightly steeds
With spindle-shanks were run;
What flights into the moon-lit air
On gauzy-winged balloons;
While all the while the insect choir
Played up their million tunes.

But hark! a trumpet tone rings out,
And then a shrill alarm—
"Arm, arm, my braves!" cried Silver-Gloss,
"With spear and buckler arm!
'Tis Tangle-Foot, the wicked imp,
With all his evil horde,
To drive us from our corn-field fair;—
Out, every flashing sword!"

They marshalled quickly for the fray,
And quickly came the foe;
Dark, haggard imps, with glaring eyes,
And grizzly shapes of woe;
Led on by scowling Tangle-Foot,
Armed with a crooked sword;
While Toddlekins, upon her throne,
Sat trembling for her lord.

Strike! fairies, strike! for life and limb,
For honor and for fame!
And strike to rid your corn-field home
Of wickedness and shame!
Hurrah! hurrah! for Silver-Gloss!
The evil one is down!
The silver-crested, fairy king,
Has saved his life and crown!

Then all the phantoms shrieking fled,
And joyously once more
The fairies sang and danced and played
As merrily as before.
While through the pleasant summer night,
O'er hills and fields and dells,
The insect voices rose and fell
Like chiming silver bells.

The moon sank down, the light of dawn
  Came creeping o'er the skies,
And troubled little Toddlekins
  Rubbed both her sleepy eyes;
Upon her pumpkin throne she sat
  Quite lonesome and forlorn,
For nothing of the show remained
  But waving fields of corn.

A CATASTROPHE.

NO human being
Who saw that sight,
But felt a shudder
Of chill affright.
He sat in a window
Three stories high,
A little baby
With no one nigh.
A stranger saw him
And stopped to stare;
A crowd soon gathered
To watch him there.

A gleam, a flutter,
In airy flight,
Came past the window
A butterfly bright.
From fields of clover
And perfumed air,
Wayfaring insect
What brought you there?
The baby saw it,
And eagerly,
Reached out to catch it,
And crowed with glee.

A CATASTROPHE.

With fat, pink fingers,
  Reached out—and fell!
The awful horror
  No tongue can tell.
Poor little baby,
  So sweet and bright!
Pale faces quivered,
  And lips grew white,
Weak women fainted,
  Strong men grew weak,
And rose one woman's
  Heart-piercing shriek.

Hurrah for the awning!
  Upon the fly,
It caught the youngster
  And tossed him high;
The bounce prodigious
  Made baby scowl;
He caught his breath, sir,
  And set up a howl.
All blessed the awning
  That had no flaw,
But a madder baby
  You never saw.

DOWN THE SWITCHBACK.

SIDE by side we rode together,
On a clear October day,
While the mountains, crimson-crested,
Kept a royal holiday.
Down the Switchback from Mount Pisgah
We went speeding o'er the hills,
With the golden sunlight flashing
From the rippling, mountain rills.
But the flashing and the glinting,
And the blue of autumn skies,
Were but frosty in their beauty
To the summer of her eyes.
Side by side we rode together,
And I did not dare to wait,
For she was seventeen, and I
Was turned of forty-eight.

So I whispered to her: "Darling,
  Let us travel, side by side,
Down the grade of Life's long Switchback,
  To the shoreless ocean's tide."
But she looked away far over
  All the hills that lay between,
To the distant, dim horizon,
  And her eyes were *too* serene,
As she said: "I like October,
  With its splendors of decay,
But I like the spring-time better,
  And the warm, sweet air of May."
Thus we traveled down the Switchback,
  Thus I trifled with my fate;
For she was seventeen, and I
  Was turned of forty-eight.

METROPOLITAN
CHARACTER SKETCHES IN VERSE.

THE BAR-TENDER'S STORY.

WHEN I knew him at first it is certing
That he was a model young man;
Apparently Nature had shaped him
On a sort of a liberal plan;
Had guv him good looks and good language,
And manners expressive and free,
And a habit of spending his money
Which was really a pleasure to see.

He was noways inclined to be stuck up,
Nor the sort to be easy put down;
And was thought to be jolly agreeable
Wherever he went around town.
He used to come in for his beverage
Quite regular, every night;
And I took a consid'able interest
In mixing the thing about right.

A judicious indulgence in liquids
It is natural for me to admire;
But I have to admit that for some folks
They are pison complete and entire;
For rum, though a cheerful companion,
As a boss is the devil's own chum;
And this chap, I am sorry to state it,
Was floored in a wrastle with rum.

For he got to increasing his doses,
And took 'em more often, he did;
And it grew on him faster and faster
Till into a bummer he slid.
I was grieved to observe this young fellow
A letting himself down the grade;
And I lectured him onto it sometimes,
At the risk of its injuring trade.

At last he got thundering seedy,
And lost his respect for himself,
And all his high notions of honor
Were bundled away on the shelf.
But at times he was dreadful remorseful
Whenever he'd stop for to think,
And he'd swear to reform himself frequent,
And end it by taking a drink.

What saved that young feller! A woman!
She done it the singlerest way.
He came in the bar-room one evening
(He hadn't been drinking that day),
And sot himself down to a table
With a terrible sorrowful face,
And he sot there a groaning repeated,
And calling himself a gone case.

He was thinking and thinking and thinking,
And cursing himself and his fate,
And ended his thinking as usual,
By ordering a Bourbon straight.
He was holding the glass in his fingers,
When into the place from the street,
There came a young girl like a spirit,
With a face that was wonderful sweet.

And she glided right up to the table,
And took the glass gently away,
And she says to him: "George, it is over;
I am only a woman to-day!
I rejected you once, in my anger,
But I come to you lowly and meek;
For I can't live without you, my darling;
I thought I was strong, but I'm weak.

You are bound in a terrible bondage,
And I come, love, to share it with you;
Is there shame in the deed? I can bear it,
For, at last, to my love I am true;
I have turned from the home of my childhood,
And I come to you, lover and friend,
Leaving comfort, contentment and honor,
And I'll stay to the terrible end.

Is there hunger and want in the future?
I will share them with you, and not shrink!
And together we'll join in the pleasures,
The woes and the dangers of drink."
Then she raised up the glass, firm and steady,
But her face was as pale as the dead—
"Here's to wine and the joy of carousals,
The songs and the laughter," she said.

Then he rose up, his face like a tempest,
And took the glass out of her hand,
And slung it away, stern and savage,
And I tell you his manner was grand!
And he says: "I have done with it, Nelly,
And I'll turn from the ways I have trod,
And I'll live to be worthy of you, dear,
So help me a merciful God!"

What more was remarked, it is needless
For me to attempt to relate;
It was some time ago since it happened,
But the sequel is easy to state;
I saw that same feller last Monday,
Looking nobby and handsome and game;
He was wheeling a vehicle, gentlemen,
And a baby was into the same.

THE OLD FIREMAN'S STORY.

YES, yes; you've got a fine machine—a beautiful machine;
A handsome critter, burnished well, and smart and neat and clean.
I s'pose now, with your horses and your telegraph alarms,
And fire and steam to do the work, instead of hands and arms,
It ain't so hard on flesh and blood, and like as not the fires
Has less to brag of fighting steam, that never slacks nor tires;
But, boys, those old machines of ours—we loved 'em mighty well,
And liked to hear the music of the good old fire-bell!

Yes, thank you, boys, I wouldn't mind to sit and chat awhile,
And have a pipe, and hear you tell about the modern style;

But somehow, boys, I don't believe, in these here temperance days,
You get the same enjoyment from a roasting, roaring blaze
Like what we did in olden times, when through the sleeping town
The watch-tower clanged the loud alarm. It did the business brown,
And fetched the night-caps out of bed to see the fun, you know,
When I was chief of Neptune Five, some thirty years ago.

I feel at home amongst you, boys; it carries me away
To times when our red shirts and belts was thought to be quite gay.
And then the girls—poke bonnets, eh?—would always have an eye
For any gallus fireman. God bless the girls! says I.
I s'pose some of you may have heard about the little strike
That makes me easy nowadays and independent like;
For though I'd take no payment then, it didn't come so ill
When clean five thousand dollars, boys, was left me in a will.

It happened on a summer's night, in eighteen forty-two:
A fine house on a corner up in Second Avenue
Took fire in the basement, and before the people woke

The flames were raging down below—the house was full
of smoke.
When we got there the people was a dropping, white
with fear,
To the roof of an extension from the second story rear.
They were safe; but thrilling through us rang a cry of
wild despair
From out an upper window, and we saw a woman there.

A woman with a little child held to her bosom tight.
I was up on the extension in a jiffy at the sight,
And I climbed in at the window through the smoke
that rushed out thick,
And I groped my way up blindly—not a second, though,
too quick,
For the fire was gaining headway fast; and when I
found the pair
It was bursting out where I climbed in, and shooting
up the stair.
Too late to save them from below—I saw that plain
enough;
I don't know how I done it, but I got 'em to the roof.

As we came up a cheer broke out from anxious crowds
beneath;
But still my chance was mighty slim to save us all from
death.
No ladder could have reached us through the smoke
and flame below;

The next roof thirty foot away—an awful gap, you know.
Cut off, it seemed, from human aid, no means of rescue nigh;
Alone between a blazing hell, a black and lurid sky;
Three of us, face to face with death, hemmed in with terrors wild,
And one a trembling woman was, and one a little child.

I never see a sight like that—the mother kneeling there,
Her arms around the little boy, her face upturned in prayer.
If ever human agony reached right up through the skies,
Then did the supplication of those piteous, pleading eyes.
Likely heaven took an interest the little one to save,
For now they're on the other roof—my boys so prompt and brave!
And now they've hauled a ladder up, and now it's shoved across;
But such a bridge! You'd better b'lieve the thing was perilous.

The mother saw and shuddered; cast one more glance around
Upon the gathering, fiery doom, and heard its sullen sound;
Then kissed the child with clinging lips and held him out to me:

"Save *him*, save *him*—my precious boy! *My* life is naught," said she.
I took him, started; rung by rung I stepped the chasm o'er,
Through stifling gusts the fire sent up with dull and angry roar;
Till, safe across, the child I gave, then turned to cross again
To help the mother; but I saw the peril would be vain!

She had watched the dizzy journey with a mother's eager eye,
Until we stood in safety; then she heard a little cry,
And saw her baby's outstretched arms. Another look to God:
"Yes, darling; mamma's coming now"—and forth the woman trod.
Her feet were bare, her hair was loose and streaming on the night;
The lurid glow lit up her face with red, unearthly light.
I tell you now *my* nerves were shook performing of the feat
That that pale woman undertook through fiery gusts of heat.

No doubt her feet was guided. Like a spirit swift she came,
While the roof behind her, as she left, broke into sweeping flame.
But when the dreadful journey in safety she had passed,

Her woman's weakness triumphed and went back on her
at last,
And she fell amongst us fainting; but I reckon such a
cheer
As went up on that occasion would a done you good
to hear.
It was nip and tuck 'tween life and death for all of us
that night;
But death was euchred. That's all, boys; I'd thank you
for a light.

DADDY FLICK'S SPREE.

DADDY Flick was a queer old Dick,
Trudging along with a crooked stick,
Frowsy and dirty and tattered and torn,
Wearing a hat that a goat would scorn
To nibble at, it was so forlorn.
He was gray as a badger and old as a crow,
And his eyes were queer—well, beery, you know,
Bleached and weak—and he had, I suppose,
The most absurd and peculiar nose
That ever invited a passer-by
To think of the worth of ebriety.
Naught can I say in his praise, I wot.
Respectable? Honest? Oh, certainly not!
Most people called him a wretched old sot.
Only a beggar. He used to stand,
Day by day, with his hat in his hand,
Asking for pence from the grave and the gay,
And getting them, too, I am glad to say,

Not in abundance, but just enough
For a little bread, and more of the stuff
That went to nourish his curious nose
And keep it blooming, a full-blown rose.
"Life," he said, "For the rich or poor,
Means but the same—endure, endure!
Troubles to poor and rich befall,
But the bottle," he said, "Is a friend to all."

Now that you know the old reprobate,
Beggar, dishonest, inebriate,
All that he asks, sir, of you or me
Is a little measure of charity.

For twenty years he had been the same,
Till at last the usual period came
When age began to assert itself
And threatened to lay him upon the shelf.
And parties said in that part of the town
That the poor old sinner was breaking down;
When all at once he was seen to be
Displaying a greater activity;
Begging with more than his usual vim,
And, what was entirely new for him,
Picking up jobs, and inquiring, too,
For any work he could find to do.
Neighbors said it was strange, if true,
When they heard a rumor to that effect;
A change impossible to expect.
It seemed, you perceive, anomalous

That Flick should be turning industrious.
But so it was; if you'll listen well,
The bottom facts of the case I'll tell.

All of us, in this vale of tears,
Rush along through the busy years
Chasing phantoms, and, when they're caught,
Finding out we have captured naught.
I have caught shadows—confound the same!
Happy the mortal who has no aim.

Flick, for seventy years to date,
Had never thought to be bothering fate;
Had been contented to barely live,
Caring for nothing the world can give.
A sort of philosopher, as I think,
In seeking for naught but his meat and drink.
But, mind you, never a notion had he
Of any taint of philosophy.

The greatest and wisest have one soft streak,
And so at the last Flick showed up weak.

He said to himself on a certain day,
"Daddy Flick, you are old and gray,
Likely to drop off any day.
Before your coffin is lowered down,
Or, what is worse, you go on the town,
You ought to have, as it seems to me,
One good, old-fashioned, expensive spree."

Alas, I fear that my readers all
Are disappointed at such a fall;
I wish he had felt a higher call,
Something of nobler and healthier tone,
An aspiration with more backbone.
But I told you before that the poor old rat
Had never a virtue beneath his hat.
I must tell my stories as they befall;
If you don't like 'em, don't read 'em, that's all

After a couple of months had passed,
Daddy Flick had at length amassed
A sum sufficient, he thought, to see
His way to that same old-fashioned spree.
And so one night as he paddled home,
He said to himself that the time had come,
And, cackling over an ancient song,
He jingled his cash as he went along.

What were his assets? A marvelous sum,
Enough to purchase unlimited rum,
(Listen, you who collect your rents!)
About a dollar and fifty cents.

Passing along by a vacant lot,
(The name of the street I have clean forgot)
A very diminutive boy he spied,
Slouching a very tall fence beside:
A lonesome figure, so woe-begone,
So desolate-looking and haggard and wan,

That even Flick, in his callous heart,
Felt a movement of pity start.
Ragged he was and exceedingly small,
With garments that covered him, that was all;
A cap remarkable after its kind,
With front dismantled and baggy behind;
Shoes too big by about a mile,
But gaping wide with a frightful smile,
As though they laughed at the tiny feet
That dragged such a burden along the street.

He stood there listless and weary and worn,
Hands in his pockets, alone and forlorn;
His features stained with the dirty streaks
Of the tears that had dried on his little cheeks.

Flick was none of your tender sort,
Philanthropy never had been his forte;
But the look of the child was so woefully sad
That he stopped and spoke to the little lad,
And got the story I'll tell to you,
Since it only requires a line or two:
His mother had died in a drunken fit,
He was hungry, and that was the whole of it.

Flick, as you know, was all primed for a spree;
All the same he said, "Come with me!"
And took the child to his narrow den,
And fed him and kept him that night, and then,
To cut it short, he put up the tin

He had labored so long and so hard to win,
And started the boy in the paper trade,
Where he prospered well and a living made.

Then Flick returned to his ancient ways,
And loafed and begged through the listless days;
Cracking, by way of amusing folk,
An occasional rummy and senile joke.
But what is the funniest thing to me,
He always thought he had had that spree,
And bragged about it to every one,
That for once in his life he had had some fun.

He died in the course of time, and went,
I make no doubt, to his punishment;
For, of course, such a wretched old sinner as he
Could stand no show in eternity.
There's just one thing to his credit, though,
He never asked to be born, you know.

POOR LITTLE JOE.

PROP yer eyes wide open, Joey,
Fur I've brought you sumpin' great.
Apples? No, enough sight better!
Don't you take no int'rest? Wait!
Flowers, Joe—I know'd you'd like 'em—
Ain't them scrumptious? Ain't them high?
Tears, my boy? Wot's them fur, Joey?
There—poor little Joe!—don't cry!

I was skippin' past a winder
Where a bang-up lady sot,
All amongst a lot of bushes—
Each one climbin' from a pot;
Every bush had flowers on it—
Pretty? Mebbe not! Oh, no!
Wish you could 'a seen 'em growin'.
It was such a stunnin' show.

Well, I thought of you, poor feller,
  Lyin' here so sick and weak,
Never knowin' any comfort,
  And I puts on lots o' cheek.
"Missus," says I, "if you please, mum,
  Could I ax you for a rose?
For my little brother, missus,
  Never seed one, I suppose."

Then I told her all about you—
  How I bringed you up—poor Joe!
(Lackin' women folks to do it)
  Sich a imp you was, you know!
Till yer got that awful tumble,
  Jist as I had broke yer in
(Hard work, too) to earn your livin'
  Blackin' boots for honest tin.

How that tumble crippled of you,
  So's you couldn't hyper much—
Joe, it hurted when I seen you
  Fur the first time with yer crutch.
"But," I says, "he's laid up now, mum,
  'Pears to weaken every day;"
Joe' she up and went to cuttin'—
  That's the how of this bokay.

Say, it seems to me, ole feller,
  You is quite yourself to-night;
Kind o' chirk—it's been a fortnit
  Sence yer eyes has been so bright.
Better? Well, I'm glad to hear it!
  Yes, they're mighty pretty, Joe.
Smellin' of 'em's made you happy?
  Well, I thought it would, you know.

Never see the country, did you?
  Flowers growin' everywhere!
Some time when you're better, Joey,
  Mebbe I kin take you there.
Flowers in heaven? 'M—I s'pose so;
  Dunno much about it, though;
Ain't as fly as wot I might be
  On them topics, little Joe.

But I've heerd it hinted somewheres
  That in heaven's golden gates
Things is everlastin' cheerful—
  B'lieve that's what the Bible states.
Likewise, there, folks don't git hungry:
  So good people, w'en they dies,
Finds theirselves well fixed forever—
  Joe, my boy, wot ails yer eyes?

Thought they looked a little sing'ler.
Oh, no! Don't you have no fear;
Heaven was made fur such as you is—
Joe, wot makes you look so queer?
Here—wake up! Oh, don't look that way!
Joe! My boy! Hold up yer head!
Here's yer flowers—you dropped 'em Joey.
Oh, my God, can Joe be dead?

UNDER A CANVAS SKY.

OUR turn at last! Now, Roland, go!
A triumph waits for us you know;
The clown looks on with hard grimace
Upon his leering, painted face;
The tyrant of the ring walks round
And cracks his whip with pistol sound;
The crowd applauds;—now faster yet,
With gallop and with pirouette!
Our blood is up, we know no fear,
A whirlwind in our mad career,
My horse and I, away we go!—
What pain is this that chills me so?

A pain that always comes to me
With bitter envy when I see
A maiden fair, with shining hair,
Like yonder girl that nestles there,
And looks up to her lover's face
With wistful eyes and tender grace.

Alas! for me no eyes are fond,
I hold no heart in silken bond,
I have no part with love or tears,
No mother cares, no tender fears,
I have no joy this trade above,
I am a thing no man will love;
A circus-rider, bold and free,
Unsexed, unloved, unwomanly.

Ho! bring the flags, balloons and rings!
I'll cut a dash, for all the stings
That lash me when I see the sight
Of lovers' eyes with love alight.
Yon maiden's innocent young heart
Some day with bitter wounds shall smart;
She yet shall know that lovers' vows
The cause of shame and death espouse;
Or, if she live to be a wife,
That love grown cold is death in life.
Away! my gallant steed, away!
What care we for such trivial play?
Blow, trumpets, with your brazen throats!
One sky o'er all the wide world floats.

One sky? My world is in this tent;
My sky is canvas, somewhat rent
And soiled with handling,—so am I;
What know I of the clear blue sky?
How would these gaping idiots stare

To see me make a dash for air,
And ride straight out of yonder door
All heedless of what lies before;
Out in the moon's clear, silver light;
Out in the cool, fresh air of night;
Away from all the senseless din,
The garish lights, the painted sin,
The crashing thunder of the band,
Into the peace of some new land?

There is no such, and nothing new
Will come for aught that I can do.
New, unknown lands are for the dead,
And in this tent I win my bread,
And bread is life, and life is long,
And must be lived by weak and strong.

Look, lovers' eyes, for what you prize,
Into each other's love-lit eyes!
Be merry if you can, I know
What fools you are, but, even so,
I envy you the happy lot
Of being fooled—as I am not.

But if my chance in life had been
To be a maiden fair, within
A home made beautiful and bright
With peace and plenty, then I might,

Perhaps, have known what love can do
To sanctify the favored few;
My heart might then have known the bliss
Of leaning to a lover's kiss;
Of looking up with maiden grace
Into a lover's strong, bright face;
Of finding hope and joy and rest
Upon a tender, manly breast.

Now for the hurdles! Roland, see,
They've laid out work for you and me.
You are the lover that I prize!
Fire flashes from your splendid eyes!
Once, twice around, once more, and then—
Well done, sir! Bravo! Once again!
With you I'd ride at Fate outright,
And jump the gates of Death at sight!
Good horse! Well sprung! Now dash away!
I do not care in this wild play
For all that my hard life has cost,
For all the things that I have lost,
For aught that grim mischance can bring,
For life or love or anything!
Away! away! my gallant steed,
With clattering hoof and lightning speed,
And show to staring dunce and dolt
How flies a living thunderbolt!

* * * * *

So weak and faint! What hurts me so?
What was that whispering sad and low?
What ghostly faces did I see?
What far off music came to me
Like wailing dirges for the dead?
What mountains rest upon my head?
What river rushes dark and drear?
What dashing waves are those I hear?
Dreams!—But I am not dreaming now,
Helpless and weak and crushed—but how?

A thousand eyes were on me there,
A thousand voices filled the air,
And stirred the very flags unfurled,
And then a crash that shook the world;
That thrust me down from life and light
Into a dim and dreadful night
Of phantom shapes and sounds of fear—
Ah, yes, I know, I'm dying here.

Dying?—And Roland too is dead?
I would have gladly died instead.
My splendid horse! And there was none
For me to love but him, not one.
Dying! And Roland dead! Then I
Have nothing left to do but die.

Only a girl's face fond and fair,
But yet it drove me to despair,
And made me reckless, mad and wild.
But it was not her fault, poor child.
Why that is she! Kneel by me here,
And pray to God for me, my dear.
I had no lover, child or friend,
But rode my best unto the end,
For that was all I had to do.
Life came with sweeter gifts to you.
Pray for me! - It is cold and dark.—
Can that be Roland neighing?—Hark!
Yes, I am coming. Roland, see,
They're waiting there for you and me.

FATHER JOHN.

HE warn't no long-faced man o' prayer,
A peddling scriptures here and there,
A shooting off his texts and tracts
Without regard to dates and facts
Or time or place, like all possessed,
Till weary sinners couldn't rest;
Fatiguing unregenerate gents,
And causing molls to swear immense.

He didn't snivel worth a cent,
Nor gush to any great extent,
But labored on a level plan—
A priest, but none the less a man—
Among the slums and boozing-kens,
And in the vilest holes and dens,
Amongst the drabs and owls and worse—
For saints in these here parts are skerce;
This ward ain't noways flush o' them,
It ain't no New Jerusalem.

He preached but little, argued less,
But if a moll was in distress,
Or if a kinchin came to grief,
Or trouble tackled rogue or thief,
There Father John was sure to be
To blunt the edge o' misery;
And somehow managed every time
To ease despair or lessen crime.

That corner house was always known
Around these parts as Poger's Own,
Till two pams in a drunken fight
Set the whole thing afire one night.
And where it stood they hypered round,
And blasted rocks and shoveled ground
To build the factory over there—
The one you see—and that is where
Poor Father John—God give him rest!—
Preached his last sermon, and his best.

One summer's day the thing was done;
The workmen set a blast and run.
They ain't so kerful here, I guess,
Where lives ain't worth a cent apiece,
As in the wards where things is dear,
And nothing ain't so cheap as here;
Leastwise, the first they seed or knowed,
A little chick had crossed the road.

He seemed to be just out o' bed,
Bare-legged, with nothing on his head;
Chubby and cunning, with his hair
Blown criss-cross by the morning air;
Dragging a tin horse by a string,
Without much care for anything;
A talking to himself for joy,
A toddling, kerless, baby boy.

Right for the crawling fuse he went,
As though to find out what it meant;
Trudging towards the fatal spot,
Till less'n three feet off he got
From where the murdering thing lay still,
Just waiting fur to spring and kill;
Marching along towards his grave,
And not a soul dared go to save.

They hollered—all they durst to do;
He turned and laughed, and then bent low
To set the horsey on his feet,
And went right on a crowing sweet.
And then a death-like silence grew
On all the trembling, coward crew,
As each swift second seemed the last
Before the roaring of the blast.

Just then some chance or purpose brought
The priest; he saw, and quick as thought

He ran and caught the child, and turned
Just as the slumbering powder burned,
And shot the shattered rocks around,
And with its thunder shook the ground.

The child was sheltered; Father John
Was hurt to death; without a groan
He set the baby down, then went
A step or two, but life was spent;
He tottered, looked up to the skies
With ashen face, but strange, glad eyes.
"My love, I come!" was all he said,
Sank slowly down, and so was dead.

Stranger, he left a memory here
That will be felt for many a year,
And since that day this ward has been
More human in its dens of sin.

LOVE IN OYSTER BAY.

I AIN'T anybody in particular,
And never cal'lated to be;
I'm aware that my views doesn't signify
Except to Belinda and me;
But I'm heavy on openin' oysters—
In regards to them I am free
To remark, that for shellin' of Blue Points,
There is few that can lay over me.

Excuse my perfessional blowin',
It isn't the point I would make;
But I'm feelin' particular airy
An' uncommonly wide-awake;
An' I've got to be talkin' about it,
It won't lay quiet y' see,
Which the name of the girl is Belinda
That's took an affection for me.

It's surprisin'! The fact is surprisin'!
  Just cast your eye over this frame—
Is there anything specially gallus,
  Which characterizes the same?
As a model for makin' wax-figgers
  I shouldn't make much of a stir;
But I ain't a goin' to worry,
  So long as I'm pleasin' to her.

An impediment hinders my speakin'
  As I should admire to do;
As an elocution professor
  My scholars would likely be few;
But she said, when I mentioned it to her,
  "Why, dear, don't you fret, for you see,
You tell me you love me, my darling,
  And your voice is like music to me."

I was never indicted for intellect
  Nor never arrested for cheek,
But I'm holdin' my head elevated
  Since Thursday night was a week;
Fur that was the date when Belinda
  Allowed she was partial to me,
And give me a relish fur livin'
  An' a notion of workin' fur she.

She isn't egzackly a beauty,
And also she uses a crutch;
But the eyes of that dear little cripple
The heart of an oyster would touch;
They is wonderful soft, and so lovin'—
A good-lookin' face on the whole,
Fur the light in them eyes seems to travel
Right out from a beautiful soul.

If she had been lively and hearty
I couldn't have helped her, y' see;
An' similar, then, it ain't likely
That she would uv took up with me.
An' I wouldn't uv knowed her and loved her,
So patient and gentle and sweet;
An' I wish that the whole ov creation
I could lay at her poor little feet.

I was never so chirk an' galloptious,
An' never before felt so spry;
An' I've just took to noticin', lately,
How amazin'ly blue is the sky;
An' how gay is the stars in the night-time,
A winkin' and glimmerin' down—
Good gracious! I come near forgettin'
That barrel of oysters for Brown.

WARDEN, KEEP A PLACE FOR ME.

DISCHARGED again! Yes, I am free,
But, Warden, keep a place for me;
For freedom means that I must go
Out in the wind and rain and snow,
To fight with hunger, shame and cold,
A woman gray and worn and old;
To clothe myself in rags again,
And seek some wretched, narrow den.
And after that what must be done?
Steal? Beg? Hard lines for any one.
To work is easier. I would try,
But there's no work for such as I.
A fine thing, truly, to be free,
But, Warden, keep a place for me,
For I'll come back. It's seven years
Since first I entered here in tears.
"Drunk and disorderly" I came,
And felt the burden and the shame,
The prison taint, the outlaw's dread,

When first behind his hopeless tread
The gates clang to with dreadful sound
And the dark prison walls close round.

But when I went away, I said:
"If I can earn my daily bread
I'll work my fingers off before
I'll wear a convict's dress once more."
'Twas easy said—I meant it, too.
Work? Is there work enough to do
For those who spend their weary lives,
Like toiling bees in busy hives,
And starve at last? When willing hands,
That never broke the law's commands,
Are idle by the thousands, how
Can jail-birds keep a virtuous vow?

No work, but all the same I found
The time for meals would come around;
No work, but time enough to think,
And that's the easy road to drink.
Who cared, who cares, that I was then
"Drunk and disorderly" again?
Who cares that ever with the best
I was a woman like the rest?
Who cares that one day in my life
I was a happy, joyous wife?
None care, and I care less than they,
And curse the man and curse the day.

How did I know that he would be
A drunken scoundrel, dragging me
Down in the mire? Alas, the life
He led me! Oh, the bitter strife
'Twixt love and hate! He went away
And left me with my little May—
My little child! My little pearl!
My pretty brown-eyed baby-girl!
Bah—that was only childhood's grace!
She grew up with her father's face,
Her father's selfish, wicked heart;
Grew up to take an evil part;
Grew up to soil her mother's name,
And cover it with double shame.

But I've a little baby dress—
The one soft vein of tenderness
That's run through all these hateful years—
I've wet it many a time with tears,
And many a time at dead of night
I've clasped it to my bosom tight.
What for? Because it means for me
A simple, sinless memory;
Because it means there was a time
When I, now gray with want and crime,
Old jail-bird as I am to-day,
Knew how to love and dared to pray.

What did I do? How could I know
That things would go against me so?

How could I help it? Did I plan
The fate that bound me to that man?—
The hard, blind fate that dragged me down
Among the wretches of the town?—
That snatched away all hope, all chance,
And twisted every circumstance
Against me, till at last I stood
Stripped of my very womanhood?
I could not dare to stop and think—
Was it my fault I took to drink?

No, I'm not fit for liberty;
It ain't a wholesome thing for me;
The jail takes care of me too well.
Better to be locked in a cell,
Where all is clean, and sleep is sweet,
Than roam the misery-haunted street;
Better the work they give us here
Than what awaits me when I'm clear;
Better the silence we must keep
Than drunken cries and curses deep;
Better the dull days free from pain
Than shattered nerves and throbbing brain;
Better the quiet, sober life
Than yonder city's desperate strife;
Better the prison's homely fare,
Better the prison's watchful care,
Better for me than liberty—
So, Warden, keep a place for me.

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